

Unchanging pattern

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Summary: Vlad usually knows what to do after he and Cassie have completed a slash-fest; he usually knows how to feel when Cassie is upset. Today is different.

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Author notes: Takes place shortly after Cassie has had to kill her mother and her father, shortly after she has been reunited with him, has died; she has already broken up with Georgia as well.

Vlad knew that things were bad when Cassandra would not eat- not even fried burritos or orange cream soda. She had often spoke before of "comfort" food and its necessity when she "felt like shit," and Vlad had always been happy to provide her with what she said she needed, although he had often wondered what she meant by her statement. He, personally, had never felt shit, but he was pretty sure that Cassandra's solid body would feel the same on the outside regardless of how sad or angry she was.

But he was used to some of the more puzzling things that Cassandra said by now, and to her snicker and occasional rolling eyes when he questioned her as to her meaning. What concerned him after she had watched her mother die for the third time, the same day that her newly found father had been killed as well, was that Cassandra was not saying or doing anything at all.

This was not the pattern, after they had killed a slasher, or even watched someone die that did not deserve it, someone Cassandra and sometimes Vlad considered a friend. What was supposed to happen was that Cassandra would be moody and snap at him, maybe even yell at him. She was supposed to eat a lot of junk food and frown and watch

old movies with no blood, turn on the van's radio to loud music that shook the car and hurt Vlad's ears, and sometimes, she let Vlad hug her. Sometimes she even cried, though Vlad knew that he was not supposed to ever tell her that this was an expected part of the pattern.

This time none of this had happened at all. This time Cassandra didn't eat anything he offered or ask him to get her anything different. She didn't sleep, or even close her eyes. She didn't want to talk, even when Vlad offered, and in fact, she didn't say anything at all. She didn't react to Vlad's touch, or to anything at all, and as badly as she must have been feeling, she didn't even cry.

Vlad had not known what to do for her to make her feel better, and she wasn't giving him any ideas or directions. In the end he carried her out of the van, booked them a motel room, and laid her on the bed, tucking her in under the blankets. Sitting beside her, he had taken her small, bloodstained hand in his and tried again to talk to her, but there was no response.

"Hrrrâ€|Cassandraâ€|we can talkâ€|if you would likeâ€|."

"Hrrrâ€|Cassandraâ€|your face is bloodyâ€|I can help you to wash it?"

"Hrrrâ€|Cassandraâ€|would you like for us to hug?"

Nothing seemed to be what she was looking for or wanting, or even something she heard. And when a full day passed with no change, with Vlad growing more worried, anxious to leave her alone in her state of mind, he had known what he would have to do, what he had been hoping to avoid, had been putting off since the moment this happened. But with Cassandra still silent and motionless in bed, unresponsive to his awkward efforts, he had known it was the only way.

It was Georgia she wanted, Georgia who could help her. And so with a resentment that made some private self-hatred spring up silently within his chest, Vlad had phoned her, then simply waited for her to arrive and make Cassandra right again, for her to do what he knew he couldn't.

And the moment Georgia had come through the door, the second she said Cassie's name and laid a hand on her shoulder, Cassandra had responded as though coming out of a sleep. It was Georgia's comfort she wanted, Georgia she hugged and talked to and cried to, and Vlad had seen a kiss or two also. They had probably had the sex too, he was sure, as much as he didn't want to think about that. He had left the room as Georgia came in. After all, it was clear that Cassandra didn't want or need himâ€|just Georgia.

And Vlad couldn't stand the thought of that, let alone watching it with his own eyes.

It wasn't that he wanted Cassie that way- the sex way. No, Cassandra was very pretty, but she was not someone Vlad would do the sex with, even if that was something she would want. It was more that he didn't want her to be taken from him, and every time Georgia was around, and even when she was not, but just talking to Cassandra on the phone, that was exactly what would happen.

It was Georgia now who did the things for Cassie that used to be for Vlad to do. Georgia was the one Cassie talked to and was comforted by, Georgia, not Vlad, was the one she depended on to make her better. Cassie liked Georgia better than him, Vlad was sure, and this was what made him almost despise Georgia. He would not wish her harm, but he did wish she would go far, far away.

Vlad could understand why Cassandra would prefer Georgia, of course. Georgia was small and pretty like Cassie, and no one had ever looked at her and mistaken her for a slasher because of her looks. With Georgia Cassie could feel like a normal girl and have a normal life. Vlad had never had a normal life and never could, not without shrinking a foot and being given a brand new body, a brand new face. If Cassandra spent so much time with Georgia, she might decide that she was tired of her life with Vlad and hunting slashers and leave to be with Georgia instead. If she was happy with Georgia, she had no reason to stay with Vlad. And where would that leave Vlad? What would he do, without having this purpose in life? Without having Cassandra?

It might be wrong of him to wish on Cassandra a life that was not normal, a life of monsters and death, if she was happier without it. But Vlad could not deny to himself that this was exactly what he did wish. It might be selfish and mean, but he had never learned to lie, and he could not pretend that if Georgia dumped Cassie, it would make him happy. It would give him his role in Cassie's life back, give him an assurance that his purpose would live on.

What he didn't expect was for Cassie to dump Georgia.

They had migrated to Georgia's place at some point in the night to stay rather than the motel- probably, Vlad thought darkly, because the girls wanted to do the sex without Vlad being in the same room. He had not heard any sounds that would tell him that was what was happening, but then, he had been trying hard not to listen.

He had awakened from his restless sleep in Georgia's too-small guestroom bed before the sun had risen and had padded his way towards her kitchen, intending to make himself a snack, perhaps watch some of the television. Vlad had a habit of breaking remotes in his large hands with his awkward handling of them, and so he suspected it would be a better idea to turn it on from the TV itself.

When he reached the living room, however, he saw that Cassandra was lying on the couch, eyes closed. He had blinked, startled, and begun to back out of the room, but then she opened her eyes and sat up, no signs of sleepiness about her face or evident in her movements. Her eye makeup was smeared, and she rubbed her hand across her face, further accentuating this as Vlad greeted her awkwardly.

"Cassandra? You are not with Georgia's bed?"

"No, I'm on her couch," Cassie raised an eyebrow, and Vlad fumbled to rephrase the sentence more clearly but still with delicacy, not wanting the answer even as he asked it.

"Hrrr? I mean? You are not with Georgia?"

"Do you see her anywhere around me?" Cassie looked around as though to make sure of this, before relenting somewhat on the sarcasm and providing the bones of an explanation. "Couldn't sleep."

"Ahâ€¦" Vlad shifted his weight, still wondering what, exactly, was the situation, because if she and Georgia had been doing the sex, he was pretty sure that sleep was not usually part of the equation. "Hrrrâ€¦are you havingâ€¦the bad dreams?"

"Noâ€¦" Cassandra muttered without elaborating, then stood and stretched, gesturing for Vlad to begin to move as well. Vlad could not tell looking at her what she was thinking or feeling, but this was not unusual. He usually couldn't, even if she told him that she had just told him.

Even Cassandra's words could be rather confusing.

"Get ready to leave, we're heading out soon," was all she said to him, and Vlad frowned, not having expected this. She did not want to stay longer with Georgia? Or was Georgia coming with them too?

"You do not want to stay?" he asked, watching as Cassandra shrugged, her reply still puzzling to him.

"Yes. Georgia will be up soon, so let's hurry."

He did not know if her "yes" meant that she wanted to leave or that she did not, but it appeared that her mind was made up, and she was not willing to discuss further. Still, he tried one more time.

"Will Georgia be coming with us?"

"No."

That was all she said, and Vlad didn't press her anymore. Instead he joined her in getting their belongings together, than making a breakfast that Cassie, he noticed, did not eat. The night before, with Georgia, she had eaten several items Georgia had set before her, and watching her then, Vlad's concern peaked, as well as his curiosity. He didn't fail to notice that when Georgia joined them, she and Cassandra avoided each other's eyes, that few words of goodbye were exchanged, and no physical contact. Vlad thought it looked like the goodbye that the girls bid to each other looked permanent rather than temporary, and he couldn't help but continue to hope.

He waited until he had driven the van over a mile past Georgia's house before asking the silent, slumping Cassandra beside him where it was that she wanted him to go. Cassie's answer was a shrug, and so Vlad simply drove straight, sneaking frequent glances in her direction. It seemed that she was still not inclined to share the many things Vlad wanted to know on her own, however, so after a few more miles he cleared his throat, trying his luck with her one more time.

"Hrrrâ€¦.Cassandraâ€¦are youâ€¦okay?"

Cassie shrugged again, then nodded, and she turned her face away from her window to instead look straight ahead out the van's windshield. Her eyes looked grim, almost angry, as she replied.

"Yeah." A beat later, she changed her mind. "Noâ€¦I meanâ€¦oh, hell." She laughed, the sound sharp, breaking, and when Vlad looked over at her again, he saw that she was swiping at her eyes, lowering her head so that her long bangs half covered her face.

"I told Georgia I'm still doing this," she said abruptly after a moment or two of slightly unsteady breaths drawn in, shaking her hair back and sitting up straight as she turned her face more fully in Vlad's direction. At Vlad's mystified expression and furrowed brow, she gestured vaguely with one hand, encapsulating herself, him, and the car in general with the motion.

"Thisâ€¦me, you, slashers, blood, guts, gore. I'm still doing it. I don't think I have a choice, or can afford to try to choose not to. It always seems to pull me back whether I want to or not. My fateâ€¦yeah right. More like my fucking doom." Cassie snorted, but her eyes were sad, and she wrapped her arms around herself, cradling her elbows in tight against her torso.

"Thenâ€¦Georgia will not come with you?" Vlad ventured, still trying to understand. His driving slowed considerably as he began to focus more on Cassie than the conversation.

She shook her head again, exhaling, and this time rolled her eyes slightly as well. "No. She'd come. I won't let her. Like she needs to have my life, you know? Like she needs to be in danger just for knowing meâ€¦just for being around me. Twenty minutes she's around me and she ends up almost dead? No way in hell am I letting her put herself at risk like that."

If Cassandra will not let Georgia come with her, and she is still going to hunt the slashers with himâ€¦.then she will stay with him. She is choosing their lifestyle, their partnershipâ€¦isn't she? She has walked away from Georgia and what Georgia can give herâ€¦she has chosen to walk away from what truly makes her happy. She is going to stay with himâ€¦.he will still have her. His life will not change, nor worsen. It will be Cassandra who is not as happy.

A burst of joy flares within him, and he tries not to smile, not to show it as he clears his throat again, trying to turn the focus back onto Georgia, rather than on the implication of Cassie's words. "Hrrrâ€¦so Georgiaâ€¦she is angry?"

Cassie shook her head, catching her lower lip briefly between her teeth and leaving black lipstick stains behind when she releases it. Her voice is low, almost a mutter when she first speaks, but it gradually builds up in volume and intensity.

"Noâ€¦she justâ€¦you know, she wanted to come. Be part of thisâ€¦part of us. But I told her, she can't. It would never work, and long distance wouldn't either. Her in danger all the time, just for knowing me, just for caring? Me in danger because I'm worried about her and have to look over my shoulder all the time, having to think every second of the day someone might make off with her when my back is turned? Just to get to me? No way, no way in hell. We'd both end up dead. I can't let myself be that stupid and that selfish, and I can't let myself want it. I can't LIKE people, let alone LOVE themâ€¦oh, shit."

She bit her lip again, hard enough then to slightly wound the skin, and she blinked several times, a sheen of wetness appearing over her eyes. Vlad was silent, conflicted now, as genuine regret for Cassie's pain mingled with his continued relief at her words. He would not be alone and unhappy, this was true, but it was always difficult for him to see his Cassandra in misery. And what was more, he did not know what his role in this moment was, what it was that she would now want or expect from him, when his efforts earlier had all failed.

"You are sad," he tried, hoping that at the very least, he had correctly identified her feelings, and was somewhat gratified when Cassie nodded, giving a faint sniffing sound and swiping at her face again. He did not yet see tears, but these were signs he had come to recognize as associated with tears to come.

"Yeahâ€¦sucks," she muttered, and Vlad slowed the car further still, ignoring the angry honks from drivers who zoomed around him in reaction. He looked around the car furtively, but there were no snacks, drinks, or tissues on hand to offer her. At the moment he had only his words, and so he offered those uncertainly.

"Hrrrâ€¦I am sorry, Cassandra."

And he was, for her pain, if not because of its cause.

Cassandra nodded, a faint incline of her head more than anything, and was silent for several moments before she spoke again, her voice rougher, more unsteady than before. "I told herâ€¦I told her I wasn't into her. You know what I mean. That I didn't like girls." She rubbed one hand up and down her arm, looking out the windshield again as she went on. "I had toâ€¦or else she would still want me. You know Georgia. She wouldn't back down, not for a secondâ€¦she'd still try. She'd still want me. So it's better if she doesn't. Better for her if she cuts her lossesâ€¦and thinks of me as the bitch I am."

Her voice cracked badly then and she pursed her lips together tightly, again blinking often and rapidly, her already pale face seeming even more drawn and shadowy in its hue. Vlad frowned, mulling over what she has just shared. It is the last part that most confuses him, for he knows, via his frequent looking up of unfamiliar words in the dictionary, that a bitch is a female dog. He does not understand why Cassandra or Georgia would think of Cassandra as a female dog, or why Cassandra would want her to. She was clearly a human, after all, and what was wrong with dogs?

"But you are not a bitch, Cassandra," he said in genuine bewilderment, his already lumpy features forming more prominent ridges with his frown as he looked over at her.

This appeared to somehow hit Cassandra in a way that still was incomprehensible to him. Her features crumpled, and she folded over, one hand covering her mouth as she broke into tears, black streaks of makeup running down her cheeks and staining her hand and sleeve. This was the part of the pattern that Vlad finally knew what to do about, or thought he did, at any rate, and so he pulled the car off the side of the road, then unbuckled his strained, fraying seatbelt, looping one arm around her and pulling her close to his chest. As Cassandra burrowed against him, her hands crushed against her own stomach awkwardly, one of Vlad's meaty hands lightly touched the fragile oval of her head, the other rubbing with as little pressure as he could

manage, so as not to hurt her, up and down her spine.

"Hrrrâ€¦it is okay, Cassandra. It is okay," he repeated the familiar words, waiting until her crying had lessened enough for him to finally understand what she was muttering against him.

"Just gonna be you and me, Vladâ€¦that's how it should have been in the first place. Should have known better than to even try otherwiseâ€¦"

It was the right words, exactly the ones he had wanted to hear, and this was exactly the right circumstances to hear them in. Everything was working out exactly as Vlad had wished, exactly as he feared it might not in the end. And yet, somehow it wasn't quite as Vlad had hoped or expectedâ€¦it wasn't quite right, and it wasn't at all satisfactory. And in spite of himself, as Vlad gently cradled his Cassie with just the palms of his hands, he almost wished that she would have agreed to kiss Georgia, to talk to her, just one last time, if only that meant she might smile.

The end

End  
file.